

## 075354 - Santa Ana River Mainstem, CA

Contributed by Girish Desai  
Wednesday, 11 January 2006

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This project consists of dredging the Lower Santa Ana River, Reach1 and part of Reach 2, to the design elevation. Reach 1 runs from the Pacific Ocean to 2.75 miles upstream, Station 7+00 to 150+00. The portion of Reach 2 to be dredged is from station 150+00 to 190+00. Volume in Reach 1 to be dredged is appx. 370,000 cubic yds. Appx. 35,000 cubic yds in Reach 2 to be dredged and clearing and grubbing required from Station 150+00 to 194+00. Dredged material will be used for beach nourishment, least tern island or nearshore disposal.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

#### Question 1:

My wife and I live in Huntington Beach about three blocks from the Santa Ana River. Today in the Orange County Register an article by Pat Brennan states the federal or state government is considering making a part of the river bottom a preserve. A least Bell's vireo has been seen there. We have been here since 1970 and survived a serious flood in 1997. We are seriously concerned. Can you help?

#### Answer 1:

Dear Sir:

Your request for information was passed on to me. I'm the environmental coordinator/biologist for the Santa Ana River project, and I have more up-to-date information on the project than some of the other folks at the Corps. I think I have some good news for you. We are probably two months away from starting a major excavation project in Reaches 1 and 2 of the Santa Ana River. That's the area from about 2000 feet above Adams Ave. to the Pacific Ocean. The contract has already been awarded, with Reach 2 (the heavily vegetated section where the vireo was seen) as an option item. The option will be awarded as soon as we get permits from the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and after we finalize our Environmental Assessment. The permits should be obtained this month. We've already reached verbal agreement with the permitting agencies on the mitigation requirements. We plan to clear all the vegetation before March 1, and then the contractor can start stockpiling sand. Most of the sediment will be taken to the beach after Labor Day. This schedule also depends on whether Congress provides funding, but I'm told the budget should be signed soon and we expect to have enough money to do the work.

I'm not sure what you read about creating a reserve in the channel. We are working with our sponsors to protect other areas of the channel just downstream of Prado Dam, but not your area. We did agree to allow small wetland vegetation (cattails, etc.) to grow in-between maintenance episodes, but these will be mowed every year to maintain channel capacity.

If you have any other questions, please call me at (213) 452-3863, or e-mail me at Hayley.J.Lovan@usace.army.mil .

--- Hayley Lovan

----- more -----

#### Question 2:

Dear Hayley,

Thank you for assisting our Residential Communities and the Orange County Public Facilities and Resources Department with the October 30th Meeting regarding the USACE dredging plans and status of Reach 1 & 2 Channel Excavation to Design Grade of the Lower Santa Ana River.

The West Staging Area also in need of excavation to original design grade. The Santa Ana River Corridor is victim of unregulated landfills by Commercial Nursery Use within Edison's Right of Way public utility easement. Local environmentalists are struggling for enforcement assistance with the removal of these unregulated fills.

For Flood Management purposes, the Santa Ana River Corridors should be excavated to original design grade. They should not be victim to unregulated landfills to a grade elevation higher than the residences, in degradation the Residential Flood Management Plan.

For Habitat Value, the Santa Ana River Corridors should not be victim of landfilling. These river corridors, historically wetland, now degraded, have Habitat Value. The Santa Ana River is soft bottom here, home to endangered Least Bell's Vireo and the Savannah Sparrow. The Dredging of the River and the Landfilling of the River Corridors delivers a double whammy to the valuable Diverse Ecological Habitat.

The Santa Ana River Corridors should be excavated to original design grade as well. Do you think it could be provided as mitigation for the River Dredging? This area is perfect for mitigation because it is immediately on the other side of the rock levy. It is historically wetland, although now degraded, with current documented obligate wetland vegetation. I believe Edison (the landowner) has mitigation work owing and the restoration of these river corridors could easily satisfy environmental losses of the CORP River Dredging and Edison Co's previous mitigation.

The Diverse Ecological Habitat really is precious here. The "no net loss" mechanism could be easily provided with the excavation and restoration of the Santa Ana River Corridors to original design grade at the same time as the River Dredging.

Mitigation elsewhere does not help Least Bell's Vireo or the Savannah Sparrow here at the Santa Ana River. They need mitigation here in their area. The Santa Ana River Corridors would be a perfect site.

Please advise if mitigation for the excavation of the Santa Ana River to original design grade could possibly be provided by excavation of the Santa Ana River Corridors to original design grade as well.

Thank You Very Much,

Merrilee Madrigal.

Answer 2:

Dear Merrilee,

Thank you for your e-mail. I also wish we could restore more of the original floodplain. Although we plan to use part of the Edison property as a staging area for the Lower Santa Ana River dredging project, the Corps doesn't own or have any permanent jurisdiction over this land. As long as it remains a utility corridor, Edison and OCSD need to be able to protect and maintain their lines. So, unfortunately, we won't be able to use that area for mitigation. However, I have been talking to someone from the City of Costa Mesa about the possibility of helping them with their plans to restore habitat in Fairview Park, just east of the channel. If it works out, part or all of the Corps' mitigation can be accomplished there.

I hope you had a happy New Year!

Hayley Lovan  
(213) 452-3863

NEWS RELEASES:

PHOTOS:

-----  
Digital photos and captions courtesy of Jan D. Vandersloot, MD taken on Friday, October 31

South of Adams. Riparian in background. Adams bridge visible.

South of Adams.

South of Adams. Brush and silt in front of trees can be removed without sacrificing the willow tree habitat.

South of Adams. Riparian on west side of channel.

South side, beginning of Reach 2 habitat.

South side of Adams from Adams Bridge. Much of this vegetation is exotic weeds. The willow habitat tends to be along the walls. The exotics and underlying silt can be dredged out.

North side of Adams, from Adams Bridge, western edge. The trees are against the eastern wall. The vegetation in the foreground and middle of the picture is exotic and can be removed, along with built-up silt.

North side of Adams, from Adams Bridge, middle of bridge. Most of this is exotic weeds and can be removed. The riparian habitat is along the far wall.

North side. A few larger willows are in the middle of the channel. If they cannot be retained, the willows in the middle can be removed and mitigated by planting more of them along the walls inside the channel.